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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6064
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0405
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0112
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7093
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5184
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3754
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0970
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3826
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2905
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7680
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0348
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5361
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000722

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: IN JAFFNA, STUDENTS TARGETED FOR
EXECUTION; BUS FIREBOMBED

REF: COLOMBO 709

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two armed, masked men entered the University of Jaffna campus in broad daylight on May 16 and delivered a note threatening eight named students with summary execution for working with the LTTE. Ambassador, following a request by the university's Vice Chancellor, spoke with both the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Minister. He urged the government to enhance Jaffna University security and follow international norms and due process if there is reason to believe any of the students was involved in illegal activity.

The Sri Lankan Army has since provided some additional protection for the campus. The incident may have been partly in retaliation for the firebombing of a bus on May 15 by young Tamils, among whom may have been one of the named students. End summary.

¶2. (C) Following a poster campaign threatening the lives of Jaffna University students critical of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, or EPDP (ref), on the morning of May 16 two masked men in civilian clothes went to the university campus.

The men, armed with pistols, delivered a note to campus security officers, in which they threatened to carry out "capital punishment" against eight named students accused of working with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). (Note: One of the students on the list participated in a meeting with Assistant Secretary Boucher and Ambassador during their May 9 trip to Jaffna.)

¶3. (C) The Vice Chancellor of Jaffna University called Ambassador later on May 16. He reported that he had just met Sri Lankan Army Commander Chandrasiri in Palaly and briefed him on the threats. Chandrasiri reportedly said he was unaware of the incident, but would ask the army to try to trace the source of the threats. He also pledged to post three additional police officers at the back gate of the university in addition to the three currently stationed in

the front, the Vice Chancellor said. The Ambassador ascertained from the vice chancellor that a U.S. message to the government to urge that the eight students be protected would be helpful and would not further endanger them.

14. (C) Ambassador called Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona and noted that although the U.S. does not normally intervene in specific cases, the Embassy had received word of a threat against eight Jaffna University students stating that they should be "punished with the death penalty" for supporting the LTTE. The Ambassador said he hoped the Sri Lankan government would take steps to protect the students. He added that if there were a suspicion that any of the students were assisting the LTTE, they should be arrested, investigated, and if appropriate, prosecuted, but the GSL should do its utmost to prevent the EPDP or any other group from carrying out its threat.

15. (C) Kohona expressed agreement and said his government was focused on trying to "win the hearts and minds of Tamil civilians." He alluded to police reports that one of the eight targeted students took part in setting a bus on fire in Jaffna. According to several press accounts, a public bus was stopped, the passengers ordered to dismount, and the bus set ablaze near Palai on the Jaffna peninsula on the morning of May 15. The press reports differed as to whether the perpetrators were LTTE cadres on motorcycles or school children on bicycles. The government has blamed the LTTE for the incident.

16. (C) Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama called in Ambassador late on May 16 for a private talk to plead for

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more U.S. understanding of Sri Lanka's difficult situation and for patience on human rights issues. In an aside, he said he understood Ambassador had been inquiring about the situation on the Jaffna University campus. The Ambassador reiterated that due process was critical when fighting internal insurgencies like that faced by Sri Lanka. If evidence existed against any of the students, they should be arrested, prosecuted and punished, but the use of unofficial militias to carry out non-judicial executions was not in accordance with international democratic norms, the Ambassador stated. The Minister agreed. Ambassador again urged the GSL to rein in the paramilitaries operating in government-controlled areas.

17. (C) COMMENT: It is certainly possible that the LTTE and/or its sympathizers may have employed such coercive tactics as a bus firebombing to try to enforce a school boycott it had called. The modus operandi of the masked intruders on the university campus, and the language used in their posters and notes, is consistent with the customary tactics and rhetoric of Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) squads. What is somewhat unusual about this incident is that, like the recent murder of a Tamil journalist in Jaffna, it occurred in broad daylight, rather than at night. While we have some indications that the number of abductions in Jaffna may have declined in the last few weeks, the methods used by the paramilitaries remain brazen.

BLAKE